



Date: March 9, 2021

Bill: HB 590 – Creation of a State Debt – M.C.C.B.L. of 2021

Item: Miscellaneous – ZA00 – National Aquarium in Baltimore

Position: Approve \$2 million in FY 2022

The National Aquarium concurs with the DLS recommendation and requests a **favorable report for the \$2 million included in the Governor’s Fiscal Year 2022 Capital Budget**. These funds will support critical infrastructure improvements at our main campus, specifically replacing the glass pyramid over the Upland Tropical Rain Forest exhibit.

The National Aquarium is working diligently to address over \$50 million in critical capital needs in our 40-year-old facility, including a plan to replace the original, iconic glass pyramid above the rain forest exhibit. In 2019, we experienced a failure in the pyramid that caused us to temporarily close the exhibit’s popular observation deck. The double-pane glass that makes up the rain forest pyramid has surpassed its usable life and must be completely replaced as soon as possible to ensure the safety of our guests, staff, and animals.

In FY21, the state of Maryland issued a \$5 million capital grant to complete the \$7.75 million project, which combined with a grant from the city of Baltimore, brought us within \$2.5 million of fully funding the project. Due to the public safety implications and urgency of the project, our intention was to divert resources from the Aquarium’s operating and capital budgets to close the funding gap and begin construction in early 2021. However, the pandemic and the Aquarium’s subsequent closure for 109 days resulted in a loss of nearly \$20 million in expected revenue in 2020 alone and it is no longer financially possible for us to close this \$2.5 million funding gap or take on additional debt. The replacement of the rain forest glass pyramid remains urgent and further delays will result in having to take the entire exhibit—one of our most iconic—offline for an indefinite period.

The requested funding in FY22 will allow the Aquarium to meet our revised schedule and begin construction in early 2022. If this state funding is approved, additional funding from the city of Baltimore and private donors will allow the Aquarium to close the project funding gap. It is hard to overstate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on every component of the Aquarium. This requested capital support could not come at a more crucial time for our organization.

We are grateful for the State’s continued support. Without it, we would not be one of America’s top aquariums—nor could we provide generations of Marylanders with an unequalled cultural and educational resource. **We respectfully request that the Committee support the full \$2 million included in the Fiscal Year 2022 Capital Budget.**

Contact:

Ryan Fredriksson

Vice President, Government Affairs

410-385-8276

rfredriksson@aqua.org

